Perceived Brand Sustainability, Product Accessibility, and Social Factors in Fast Fashion Purchase Intention among Young Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Young consumers may consider a fashion brand's sustainability practices while still buying from a sector associated with frequent product replacement. This study examines perceived brand sustainability, product accessibility, and social factors in relation to international fast-fashion purchase intention in Malaysia. An online cross-sectional survey provided 150 usable responses, which were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Perceived brand sustainability had the largest estimated direct association with purchase intention, followed by product accessibility, with both paths statistically significant. Social factors had a smaller, non-significant coefficient. The model explained 65.7% of the variance in purchase intention. Cross-validated prediction comparisons were mixed: the model outperformed a linear benchmark for four of six indicators using RMSE, but for only two using MAE. The findings highlight the role of brand responsibility perceptions and purchasing access in surveyed consumers' intentions. They also suggest that broad measures of social influence may offer limited additional explanation once these factors are included. The results concern stated intentions and do not establish changes in purchasing behavior or environmental outcomes.

Keywords: Perceived Brand Sustainability; Product Accessibility; Social Factors; Fast Fashion; Purchase Intention

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability presents a difficult question for fast-fashion marketing. Retailers compete through new collections and frequent purchasing opportunities, while environmental and labor concerns invite consumers to reconsider those purchases. Reviews by Busalim et al. (2022), Rahman et al. (2023), and Schiaroli et al. (2024) document the growth of sustainable-fashion research and the ongoing difficulty of linking favorable consumer views to consumption practices. Within this debate, brand responsibility and consumption reduction are different outcomes. A consumer who views a retailer's practices favorably may become more willing to buy its clothing without reducing the number of garments acquired.

The purchasing environment may also shape this willingness. Access to product information does not ensure that a consumer can obtain the desired item with acceptable effort. Store availability, online stock information, and delivery arrangements can affect the shopping process after a product has attracted attention. Omnichannel research treats this process as a connected journey across retail channels (Muthaffar & Vilches-Montero, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). For international fashion retailers, the relevant question is whether favorable brand evaluations remain associated with purchase intention when consumers' perceptions of access are considered.

Social influence provides another possible explanation. Research on influencers links purchasing outcomes to relationships between content creators, their audiences and the brands they discuss (Johnstone & Lindh, 2022; Bu et al., 2022; Wahab et al., 2022). These relationships can involve trust, identification, and exchanging product information. Their contribution need not be captured fully by a broad measure of social pressure. Vladimirova

et al. (2024) describe several roles for social media in sustainable-fashion consumption, suggesting that the relationship between social exposure and purchasing depends on how that exposure is defined and measured.

Earlier research in Sabah has already examined brand sustainability, social factors, and product accessibility together. Kok et al. (2024) reported significant relationships for social factors and accessibility, but not for sustainability. That study provides a direct point of comparison for the present analysis. Using 150 responses from young consumers in Malaysia, including students and employed respondents, this paper examines each predictor's estimated contribution within the same model. The comparison provides further evidence on the roles of perceived brand responsibility, purchasing conditions, and social influence in this consumer setting.

The substantive focus is the role of perceived sustainability within purchases of international fast-fashion products. Much of the literature addresses sustainable clothing as a product category, whereas consumers may also evaluate sustainability as a characteristic of a mainstream fashion brand. This distinction matters when interpreting a positive association with purchase intention, in which approval of a brand's practices can support purchasing without demonstrating more sustainable consumption. Considering accessibility and social factors alongside that evaluation allows the study to examine which associations remain after accounting for the other measured predictors.

Three questions guide the analysis: how is perceived brand sustainability associated with purchase intention, do product accessibility and social factors contribute separate associations, and do social factors retain a direct relationship when the other predictors are included? The model draws on the theory of planned behavior as a conceptual reference, but tests three contextual antecedents rather than its full original specification. The analysis provides evidence on these antecedents among surveyed Malaysian consumers and informs discussion of sustainability communication, purchasing convenience, and social marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

International fast fashion and responsible consumption

Fast fashion combines rapid assortment changes with repeated opportunities to acquire clothing. From a sustainability perspective, evaluating a retailer's production practices is only part of the problem; the volume and duration of clothing use also matter. Garcia-Ortega et al. (2023) identify sufficient consumption as an important consideration in the sector's sustainability transition. Schiaroli et al. (2024) review barriers across consumption phases, including cost, availability, skepticism, and knowledge. Together, these perspectives support a distinction between consumers' evaluations of a brand and the environmental consequences of the consumption those evaluations may encourage.

Research on sustainable clothing examines related but varied outcomes. Rausch and Kopplin (2021) investigate purchase intention and behavior, including the role of perceived risks and greenwashing concerns. Hong et al. (2024) consider values, attitudes, and norms in sustainable-fashion intentions and practices, while Masserini et al. (2024) compare generational differences in sustainable-clothing choices. Ngo et al. (2024) examine several psychological antecedents of Generation Z consumers' intentions. These studies provide a basis for considering sustainability-related evaluations in fashion decisions, while also showing why the outcome and purchasing context must be specified carefully.

Theoretical position and construct boundaries

The theory of planned behavior relates intention to attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Fashion studies have used this framework to examine different purchasing outcomes (Magwegwe & Shaik, 2024; Sobuj et al., 2021). Wing et al. (2023) adopted a contextual approach to Malaysian fast-fashion intention, using brand sustainability and trendiness, social factors, accessibility, and pricing to represent aspects of those theoretical domains. Their specification replaced the original components with these contextual variables. The present model selects three contextual predictors: perceived brand sustainability, social factors, and product accessibility. These measures concern brand evaluations, social influences, and purchasing conditions,

respectively. The study is therefore TPB-informed, but it does not directly test the full TPB model or establish that the contextual measures are equivalent to the original constructs.

Brand sustainability and purchase intention

Perceived brand sustainability concerns consumers' assessments of a fashion company's environmental and ethical responsibility. Such assessments may involve sourcing, materials, or worker-related practices, depending on the information available to the consumer. They can influence whether a brand seems like an acceptable purchasing choice. Hasbullah et al. (2022) examine sustainability-related drivers of apparel purchase intention among Malaysian consumers. Jung et al. (2024) address corporate social performance, message authenticity, and transparency in fashion purchasing. Their work supports examining how responsibility-related brand evaluations enter consumers' purchase decisions.

There are also reasons to expect variation in this relationship. A sustainability claim may reassure one consumer while prompting another to question its credibility. Adamkiewicz et al. (2022) discuss greenwashing in the fashion industry, and Rausch and Kopplin (2021) include greenwashing concerns within their account of sustainable-clothing purchasing. The systematic review by Schiaroli et al. (2024) places these concerns within a broader set of consumption barriers. The present study examines the association between perceived brand sustainability and intention without treating favorable perceptions as verification of the brand's actual performance.

For a consumer choosing among international fast-fashion products, a favorable view of brand responsibility may make a purchase more acceptable within the available alternatives. The expected relationship concerns willingness to purchase from that category. It does not imply that increased purchasing improves sustainability. On this basis, the first hypothesis is:

H1: Perceived brand sustainability is positively associated with intention to purchase international fast-fashion products.

Product accessibility and purchase intention

Product accessibility refers to the perceived ease of finding and obtaining the desired clothing. Physical and online channels can both contribute to access, although the practical conditions differ. Availability, information, and fulfillment arrangements are relevant to the broader concept. Accessibility also differs from affordability: a product may be within a consumer's budget but still difficult to find or receive. The hypothesis asks whether easier perceived access is associated with a stronger intention to purchase.

Research on sustainable-fashion retail identifies availability and visibility as barriers that can prevent interested consumers from obtaining products (Ronda, 2024; Schiaroli et al., 2024). The same practical issue is relevant to fast fashion, even though the sustainability characteristics of the products differ. Studies of omnichannel retail show that consumers evaluate experiences across connected channels (Salem & Alanadoly, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Muthaffar and Vilches-Montero (2023) likewise consider satisfaction across the shopping journey. This literature supports examining access as a purchasing condition alongside consumers' evaluations of the brand.

The Malaysia setting makes the relationship worth examining, but the present survey does not establish differences in access between districts or between urban and rural consumers. At the individual level, the expectation is more direct: consumers who perceive fewer obstacles to obtaining international fast-fashion products may be more willing to purchase them. The second hypothesis is:

H2: Product accessibility is positively associated with intention to purchase international fast-fashion products.

Social factors and purchase intention

Social factors encompass how other people influence fashion-related preferences and purchase intentions. Friends and family may offer recommendations or set expectations, while influencers can introduce brands and showcase styles to a wider audience. Johnstone and Lindh (2022) examine influencer-related mechanisms in

sustainable-fashion consumption. Bu et al. (2022) link influencer-audience similarity to value co-creation and purchase intention, and Wahab et al. (2022) examine celebrity-follower relationships. These studies support an association between social influence and purchase intentions, although their measures and settings differ.

A broad direct path is one possible representation of that influence. Social communication may also operate through engagement, information seeking, or brand evaluations. Vladimirova et al. (2024) review social media's varied roles in sustainable-fashion consumption, while Corallo et al. (2024) examine social-media constructs in clothing-related retail outcomes. El-Shihy and Awaad (2025) report an engagement-mediated relationship between content and sustainable-fashion purchase intention. The present model tests the simpler direct association. Any indirect explanation would require additional analysis. The third hypothesis is:

H3: Social factors are positively associated with intention to purchase international fast-fashion products.

METHODOLOGY

The study used an online, cross-sectional questionnaire to examine young consumers' intention to purchase international fast-fashion products in Malaysia. The target age range was 15 to 29 years. Participants were recruited through a non-probability approach, with familiarity with international fast-fashion brands used as an eligibility criterion. The analysis comprised 150 usable responses collected as a single cross-sectional dataset.

Four constructs were specified reflectively: perceived brand sustainability (BS1-BS5), product accessibility (PA1-PA5), social factors (SF1-SF5), and purchase intention (PI1-PI6). The questionnaire drew on fashion-consumption and purchase-intention measures reported by Koca and Koc (2016), Widyarini and Gunawan (2018), Arora and Kishor (2019), and Wing et al. (2023). Respondents completed the questionnaire themselves, using five response categories ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to estimate the relationships among the four constructs. The analysis examined both the explanatory results and cross-validated prediction performance. Following the reporting considerations discussed by Hair and Alamer (2022), Ringle et al. (2023), and Hair et al. (2024), measurement assessment covered indicator loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Structural assessment considered the three paths to purchase intention, their uncertainty, local effect sizes, and explained variance. Full-collinearity VIF values and PLSpredict benchmark comparisons provided additional diagnostics.

RESULTS

Respondent characteristics

The sample comprised 108 women and 42 men, representing 72% and 28% of the 150 respondents. The reported age distribution was 56% aged 18-22, 24% aged 23-27, 12% aged 28-29, and 8% below 18. Undergraduate students accounted for 51% of respondents; the remaining reported categories were private-sector employment (23%), self-employment (21%), and public-sector employment (5%). The sample therefore included both students and employed young consumers, with women predominating.

Common method bias

Table 1 presents full-collinearity VIF values for the four constructs. The assessment follows Kock and Lynn's (2012) consideration of vertical and lateral collinearity, together with the diagnostic threshold proposed by Kock (2015). Values were 2.927 for brand sustainability, 2.844 for accessibility, 2.912 for purchase intention, and 2.307 for social factors. Each was below 3.3. This diagnostic did not indicate problematic full collinearity under the adopted criterion. It should be considered alongside the study design and measurement procedures when assessing possible common method bias.

Table 1: Full Collinearity Test

Brand Sustainability	Product Accessibility	Purchase Intention	Social Factor
2.927	2.844	2.912	2.307

Measurement model

Indicator loadings and construct-level reliability estimates appear in Table 2. All indicators except SF1 exceeded 0.708, the reference value used for indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). SF1 loaded at 0.553. The item was retained in the reported model because the social factor construct met the adopted criteria for composite reliability (CR = 0.896) and average variance extracted (AVE = 0.637). Across the four constructs, CR ranged from 0.890 to 0.925 and AVE from 0.619 to 0.672. These estimates exceed the respective reference values of 0.70 and 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019), although SF1 warrants attention when interpreting the social-factor measure.

Table 2: Measurement model

Variables	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Brand Sustainability	BS1	0.843	0.890	0.619
	BS2	0.799		
	BS3	0.726		
	BS4	0.765		
	BS5	0.795		
Product Accessibility	PA1	0.774	0.905	0.656
	PA2	0.864		
	PA3	0.856		
	PA4	0.783		
	PA5	0.769		
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.818	0.925	0.672
	PI2	0.854		
	PI3	0.862		
	PI4	0.826		
	PI5	0.796		
	PI6	0.760		
Social Factor	SF1	0.553	0.896	0.637
	SF2	0.856		
	SF3	0.857		
	SF4	0.883		
	SF5	0.797		

Discriminant validity was examined through the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations introduced by Henseler et al. (2015). The assessment used the more conservative 0.85 criterion, alongside the 0.90 alternative discussed in the literature on construct correlations (Gold et al., 2001; Kline, 2015). Table 3 reports values from 0.706 to 0.847. None exceeded 0.85, providing point-estimate support for distinguishing the constructs. The highest ratio, between brand sustainability and purchase intention, was close to the adopted threshold.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Assessment (HTMT)

	BS	PA	PI	SF
Brand Sustainability				
Product Accessibility	0.818			
Purchase Intention	0.847	0.792		
Social Factor	0.762	0.832	0.706	

Structural model

Table 4 shows that perceived brand sustainability had the largest estimated direct coefficient for purchase intention ($\beta = 0.526$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.380$). Accessibility also had a positive, statistically significant coefficient ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.01$; $f^2 = 0.083$). The social-factor estimate was smaller and not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.090$, $p > 0.05$; $f^2 = 0.010$), with confidence bounds extending from -0.044 to 0.234. The results support H1 and H2, but not H3.

The three predictors jointly accounted for 65.7% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.657$). This describes the model's explanatory performance within the sample. Cross-validated prediction was examined separately through PLSpredict.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Dev	t-values	p-values	BCI LL	BCI UL	Decision	f^2
H1	BS → PI	0.526	0.081	6.521	< 0.001	0.388	0.654	Supported	0.380
H2	PA → PI	0.273	0.093	2.931	0.002	0.123	0.434	Supported	0.083
H3	SF → PI	0.090	0.084	1.070	0.142	-0.044	0.234	Not Supported	0.010

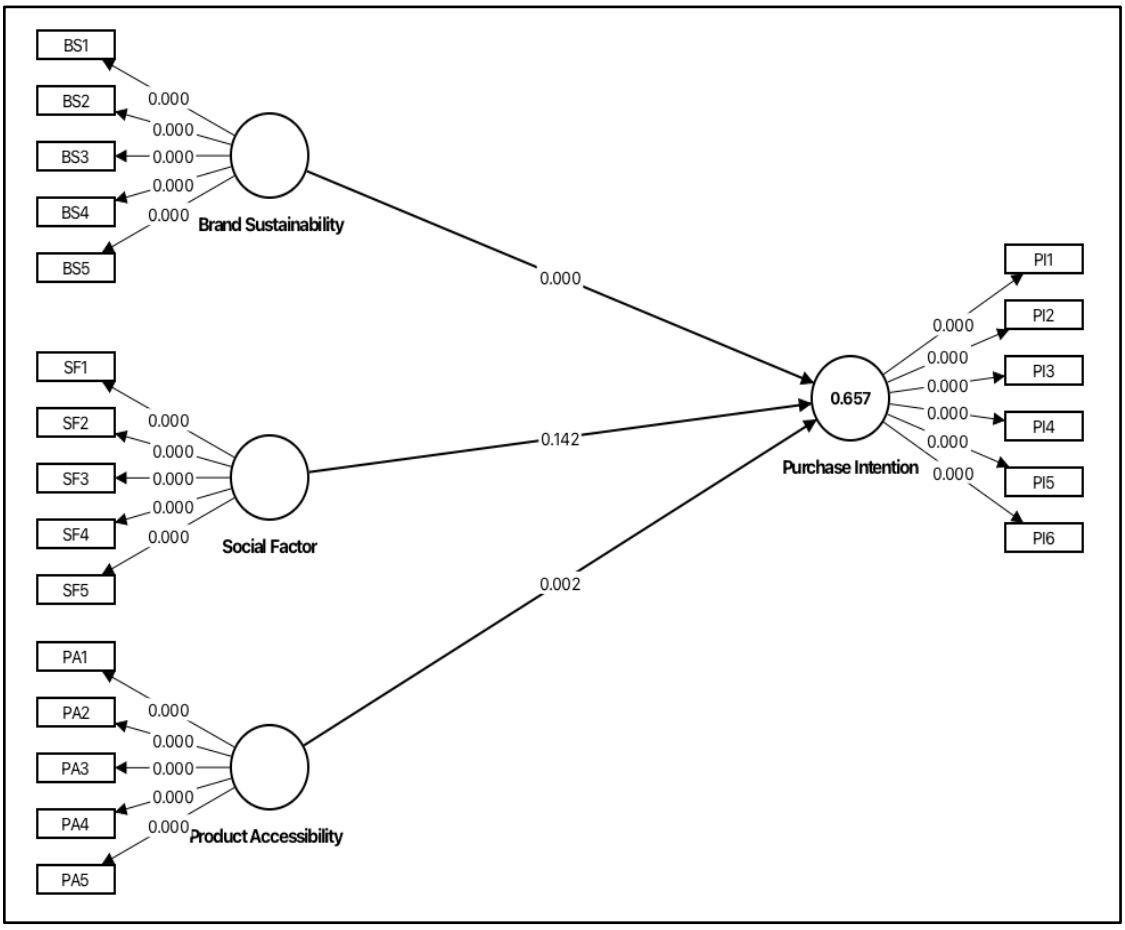


Figure 1. Structural model showing path p-values and the R^2 of purchase intention. Values displayed as 0.000 denote $p < 0.001$.

PLSpredict

PLSpredict results in Table 5 show positive Q^2predict values for every purchase-intention indicator, from 0.303 to 0.533. The PLS model therefore performed better than the mean-based benchmark for these indicators. Its comparison with the linear-model benchmark was less uniform. RMSE was lower for PLS on PI1-PI4, whereas

the linear model performed better on PI5 and PI6. Using the RMSE comparison, the majority-of-indicators criterion supports a description of medium predictive power (Shmueli et al., 2019). However, PLS had a lower MAE for only PI1 and PI2. Consequently, the benchmark assessment depends on the error metric and does not support an unqualified claim of superior predictive performance.

Table 5: PLSpredict Assessment

	Q^2predict	PLS-SEM		LM		PLS-LM	
		RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE
PI1	0.303	0.978	0.789	1.036	0.848	-0.058	-0.059
PI2	0.368	0.953	0.778	1.010	0.836	-0.057	-0.058
PI3	0.365	1.018	0.820	1.055	0.818	-0.037	0.002
PI4	0.339	0.915	0.753	0.932	0.741	-0.017	0.012
PI5	0.525	0.793	0.654	0.721	0.570	0.072	0.084
PI6	0.533	0.748	0.625	0.699	0.544	0.049	0.081

DISCUSSION

Perceived sustainability and purchase intention

Perceived brand sustainability had the largest estimated association with purchase intention in this model. Because the outcome concerns international fast-fashion products, this finding addresses how responsibility-related brand evaluations accompany willingness to buy from that category. Consumers may view a brand's environmental or ethical practices favorably while remaining interested in its mainstream products. The survey does not establish whether these intentions lead to purchases or whether the resulting consumption has a lower environmental impact.

The result can be considered alongside evidence from sustainable-apparel research, while recognizing differences in the purchasing context. Rausch and Kopplin (2021) connect sustainable-clothing attitudes with intention, and Hasbullah et al. (2022) examine relevant drivers among Malaysian millennials. Jung et al. (2024) investigate corporate social performance and communication, while Hong et al. (2024) and Ngo et al. (2024) consider wider sets of psychological influences. The present coefficient is consistent with the relevance of responsibility-related evaluations. It does not establish that fast-fashion brand perceptions and intentions to buy specifically sustainable clothing reflect the same decision.

The interpretation also needs to account for consumption volume. Garcia-Ortega et al. (2023) argue that sustainability strategies should address sufficient consumption. A favorable brand evaluation could reassure a purchaser without changing how they acquire or use garments. Greenwashing concerns discussed by Adamkiewicz et al. (2022), together with the barriers reviewed by Schiaroli et al. (2024), make the credibility of such reassurance important. Subsequent research could distinguish perceptions based on verified information from general brand impressions, then examine their relationship with actual clothing purchases.

Product accessibility and purchase intention

Accessibility remained positively associated with purchase intention after brand sustainability and social factors were included. Its coefficient was smaller than the sustainability estimate, but it contributed a separate relationship within the reported specification. This suggests that the perceived practicality of obtaining products deserves consideration alongside brand evaluations. The result concerns consumers' overall access perceptions; it does not identify which retail service drives the association.

Kok et al. (2024) also reported a positive accessibility relationship in Sabah. This agreement provides a useful point of comparison, while the differing findings on sustainability and social factors call for closer examination of sample and measurement differences. More broadly, Ronda (2024) and Schiaroli et al. (2024) identify availability-related barriers to sustainable-fashion consumption. Research on omnichannel journeys similarly shows why shopping experiences should be examined across retail touchpoints (Muthaffar & Vilches-Montero,

2023; Salem & Alanadoly, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). These studies support the relevance of purchasing conditions, although the present survey does not directly compare channels or establish district-level access differences.

For retailers, stock information, delivery coverage, fulfillment charges, and returns procedures are practical areas to investigate. Improvements should be evaluated against customers' reported difficulties rather than inferred directly from the aggregate accessibility coefficient. Location-linked surveys or service experiments would help distinguish the contribution of product availability from delivery, information, and purchasing effort.

Interpreting the social factor result

The social factor coefficient was positive, but its confidence interval included zero. The study therefore provides insufficient evidence for H3 in this model and sample. This result concerns the direct relationship after including the other predictors. It does not rule out a role for interpersonal communication in awareness, consideration, or the formation of brand evaluations.

The distinction is relevant when comparing the result with influencer research. Johnstone and Lindh (2022), Bu et al. (2022), and Wahab et al. (2022) examine particular relationships between audiences, influential sources and purchase-related outcomes. Vladimirova et al. (2024) describe a wider range of social media processes, and El-Shihy and Awaad (2025) identify engagement as a mediating mechanism. A broad social factor measure and a direct-only model may capture a different part of this process. These studies offer possible explanations to investigate, rather than evidence that an untested indirect pathway operated in the present data.

Measurement precision is another consideration. SF1 had a lower loading than the other social-factor indicators, even though the construct met the reported CR and AVE criteria. Researchers should examine its wording and coverage before attributing the non-significant path to consumers' lack of social influence. The sample composition also limits comparisons: 51% of respondents were undergraduates, and 56% were aged 18-22. Separate tests would be needed to assess differences by employment, age, or platform use.

Theoretical contribution

The findings contribute an empirical comparison of three contextual antecedents within a TPB-informed model. The estimates associate purchase intention more clearly with perceived brand responsibility and access than with the broad social factor measure. This pattern helps define questions for subsequent theory testing, although the analysis does not establish a statistically tested difference between the coefficients. The evidence concerns the three contextual antecedents; the complete original TPB specification was not directly tested.

A further contribution concerns how consumer research interprets sustainability. The present outcome addresses international fast-fashion purchase intention, and perceived sustainability concerns the brands associated with those products. The distinction between brand approval and sustainable consumption gives the positive coefficient a more specific meaning. Placing this interpretation in conversation with reviews of consumer behavior and work on sufficient consumption helps connect the marketing result to the wider sustainability debate (Busalim et al., 2022; Garcia-Ortega et al., 2023).

Managerial and policy implications

Retailers serving young consumers in Malaysia could examine whether their sustainability information answers concrete customer questions about materials, sourcing, and working conditions. Claims should be supported by evidence that consumers can evaluate. The accessibility result also supports investigating obstacles in the purchase process, including uncertain availability and fulfillment arrangements. The survey identifies associations that can guide these investigations; it does not demonstrate the sales effect of a particular communication or service intervention.

The social factor result provides no direct estimate of campaign effectiveness or return on influencer expenditure. Retailers should evaluate those activities against their specific objectives, such as awareness, product education, referrals and purchasing. Public-interest communication can also help consumers assess environmental claims

and consider garment use and longevity. Evaluating such initiatives requires outcomes beyond favorable brand perceptions, including actual acquisition, use, and disposal patterns.

Limitations and future research

The findings apply to a non-probability online sample observed at one point in time. The design limits population generalization and causal interpretation, while the age and gender composition restricts comparisons across consumer groups. All constructs were self-reported, and purchase intention may differ from later purchasing and clothing-use practices. The model also examines direct relationships without testing mediation, brand-specific differences, or the role of potential confounders such as price sensitivity.

Further work could track purchases and garment use over time, alongside changes in sustainability perceptions. Experiments varying the detail and verification of sustainability information would help test credibility's role. Separate interventions could examine stock certainty or delivery charges.

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